

**COWBOYS, POP STARS, PIMPS AND PLAYERS: THEMES IN MUSIC  
VIDEOS**

A Thesis

by

CHELCIE MELISSA WESLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2005

Major Subject: Sociology

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## **ABSTRACT**

Cowboys, Pop Stars, Pimps and Players: Themes in Music Videos. (May 2005)

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Television is something that is a part of the everyday lives of a majority of people in America. The content of what is on television can vary in nature from being positive to being negative. However, what people are exposed to through music videos, in particular, a very popular form of artistic expression, has not been thoroughly investigated. This study uses structural ritualization affect, gender schema theory, media and audience power theories, cultivation theory, agenda setting and framing theories, and (cognitive) social learning theory in order to investigate what people are actually exposed to by watching music videos, in particular, MTV, BET, and GAC.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank God this project is complete...Unbeknown to me, this journey started while I was an undergraduate working for Dr. Jane Sell with Pam Hunter-Holmes, who both accepted me into their world of Experimental Social Psychology and ultimately were the first writers on this “tabula rasa.”

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## INTRODUCTION

Mass media is an important aspect of teaching people about themselves and about others, in part because of the ability to reach and influence the most people. Entman and Rojecki (2000) say that mainstream culture, the set of schemas most widely stored in the public's mind and the core thematic frames of society, is the most pervasive in mass media messages (49). But what, exactly are the messages that are transmitted? Mass media is neither good nor bad, but simply a delivery system. We know from an enormous social psychology literature that people, can indeed, learn to perform activities demonstrated on television. They are influenced through the presentation of materials, and in particular the influence varies by the frequency, duration and intensity of the presentation (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997). In this research, I propose to examine the kind and extent of messages that people would be exposed to on a regular basis. I will do this by randomly sampling three different kinds of music video stations that are available to most people who have television access. The three different kinds of stations represent different targeted audiences and so enable me to compare messages within the particular station and across different stations. In particular, I will be examining messages related to race/ethnicity, gender, consumer or status objects and goods, and social relationships

In the literature review below, I discuss several theoretical frameworks that address how mass media in general, and television, in particular affect human behavior. I then discuss some specific findings that relate to the question I am asking: What are the messages transmitted in music videos? How pervasive or diverse or these messages?



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Extent of Exposure**

According to Lester (1996), both children and adults spend a great deal of their leisure time watching television. Children are estimated to watch an average of twenty-five hours a week and adults report spending about half of their leisure time watching television or consuming other media (Lester 1996, 6).

The importance of this rests with what is being demonstrated or delivered through television. Lester makes the point that mainstream media is least likely to be labeled as deviant, that is the “mainstream” is, by definition, not that controversial. As a result, “Media provide the lion’s share of our knowledge and beliefs concerning life outside of our direct experience” a social function of telling people what they need to know for effective self-governance, selling messages to audiences, selling brands of pleasure, and the economic function of attracting and holding a large audience for advertisers (Lester 1996, 6).

It is clear that many people watch television and that this exposure is extensive. Below I examine different perspectives on how media affects viewers. The perspectives are divided into general theories related to any kind of exposures, gender schemas and the theory of structural ritualization, media theories which specifically address mass media affects, and social psychological theories that emphasize different types of learning.

### **Theory of Structural Ritualization**

The theory of structural ritualization (Knottnerus 1997) provides one explanation for the reproduction of certain types of rituals or repeated behaviors. These rituals may or may not have sacred meaning, but they all involve certain regularities involving the

sequences of social acts. According to Knottnerus, observing or participating in such rituals can lead to a kind of recreation of them, even if they become transformed in some way. Reproduction is more likely when the rituals assume salience for the group, they occur frequently, they involve resources and the general form of the ritual is similar to other forms. These ideas contain some of the same ideas found in cognitive social learning except that this theory focuses upon groups, social interaction and precisely describes the mechanisms of transference. The theory helps explain certain ironies, for example why the coercive rituals imposed on French boys in boarding schools were reproduced in the boys' friendship groups (see Knottnerus 2002).

Sell, Knottnerus, Ellison, and Mundt (2000) conducted - the first empirical test of the theory of structural ritualization. This article extends the theory to demonstrate how one person's exposure to observations can be transmitted to other settings and other groups. The idea is that the effect of observations of ritualized sequences, like we see in videos, can affect one person who can then affect others who have never seen the ritualized sequences. Structural reproduction results when certain actions are not only copied by actors but actually become symbolic frameworks that enable the structure to be transmitted, resulting in "an array of ritualized practices and relation in an embedded group that are similar to the patterns of social arrangements of a surrounding environment" (457).

### **Gender Schema Theory**

Gender Schema theory is related to both the theory of structural ritualization and to cognitive social learning. It focuses upon the transmission of behaviors and attitudes related to gender. Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, and Sebastian (2002) argue that gender

schemas are accepted ways of viewing situations develop both from personal experience and from media. “Television can activate and then reinforce gender schemata that are already stereotyped, making them more accessible” (924). “The increased accessibility of stereotyped gender schemata means that [people] will be more likely to attend to, interpret, and recall elements of the social world using stereotypes about gender roles” (924).

### **Media Theories**

Media theories specifically examine how information is delivered. So to understand media theories I must also specifically examine the media.

#### ***Cultivation Theory***

George Gerbner, developed cultivation theory, a theory of how mass media “cultivates” or socializes its audience toward certain forms of understanding and behavior. Gerbner’s works present a social psychological based theory on communication effects, and consequently, on persuasion as related to mass media. *The Communication Initiative* (2003) reports in their article “Change Theories: Cultivation Theory of Mass Media” that “Gerbner speaks of the ‘cultivation of collective conscious’ in relation to the rapid growth of media outlets (in particular, television) and the capacity of mass media to transcend traditional ‘barriers of time, space, and social grouping’” (www.comminit.com 17). I understand the term as an idea that emphasizes the process whereby the way that media can affect individuals is based upon both subtle and not so subtle development of particular points of view absorbed or learned through media images and portrayals.

Gerbner's theory asserts that most often, heavy viewers (those that watch four or more hours a day) tend to be men and those of lower income brackets and that African Americans who are heavy viewers tend to self-report that television is their main tool of gathering information about the world (Greunke 2000). So Gerbner believes that heavy viewers are more prone to regard the world as more dangerous than light viewers and can develop a "commonality of outlook through constant exposure to the same images and labels"—a process called mainstreaming—ultimately shaping a new reality opposite of that for light viewers (McGlish and Bacon n.d., 317). For those populations that are more likely to be heavy viewers, their development of a commonality of outlook can come from living what it is they constantly view on television. Often times, the atrocities in the media are the realities for many groups in American society. So, as marginalized groups, they develop this commonality or apathetic, detached outlook on life.

### ***Agenda Setting and Framing Theories***

Brown (2002) focuses on agenda setting and frame theories. These theories propose that the media tell people both what is important in the world around them, and how to think about the events and people who inhabit that world. She says that the news and entertainment become reference points about what is important, comparing it to what they knew before being exposure to mass media, then place a judgment value on what information they were exposed to, ultimately using mass media as a tool to solve problems (Brown 2002). As a result, stereotypes are often perpetuated (an idea that gender schema theory focuses upon). Kosicki (1993) and Iyengar (1991) also use agenda setting and agenda framing theories in their articles to explain the purpose, use, and effects of mass media.

## **Social Psychology Theories**

Social Psychological theories tend to be more general, that is, not directly related to a particular type of media. These theories focus on general principles of social interaction that help explain how differing media might affect individuals and groups.

### ***Cognitive Social Learning and Social Learning***

Cognitive Social Learning Theory and its early variant Social Learning Theory, both state that people imitate behaviors of others as long as the others are not punished. “Modeling will occur more readily when the model is perceived as attractive and similar and the modeled behavior is possible, salient, simple, prevalent, and has functional value” (Brown 2002, 44).

The researcher most identified with cognitive social learning is Albert Bandura. In the last sixties and early seventies, Bandura and associates first developed a set of principles that specified how people might be reinforced or punished indirectly as well as directly. The principles that specify direct reinforcement and punishment are operant principles. The set of principles that specify learning through observation were first called social learning or modeling. Such principles could occur either by watching an actual person be reinforced or punished or could be done “symbolically” by watching individuals’ actions in media.

According to Bandura (2001) symbolic modeling is central to full understanding of the effects of mass communication. Social learning can occur either intentionally or unintentionally. That is, the observer may actually be trying to learn or model, or the observer could be totally unaware that their behavior is affected by the modeling process. Models can serve diverse functions—as tutors, motivators, inhibitors, disinhibitors, social

prompters, emotion arousers, and shapers of values and conceptions of reality (Bandura 2001, 13).

False social realities that are often reflected in media symbols, particularly through television, have the ability to be reproduced within the norms, structures, and networks of society. Bandura (2001) feels that great exposure to these mediated symbols may eventually make “the televised images appear to be the authentic state of human affairs” in which the overexposure is measured in the content found in television, not just the amount of exposure to television (12). His studies, along with many others, have found that exposure to media affects individuals beliefs about reality (Bandura 2001, 12). Some misconceptions about occupational pursuits, ethnic groups, the elderly, sex roles, the disabled, and other aspects of life are sometimes cultivated and perpetuated through televised symbolic modeling of stereotypes and can thus foster individual illusions about self and collective illusions about society (Bandura 2001, 13).

### **Summary of Social Psychology Theories and Mass Media Theories**

Regardless of theoretical perspective, conclusions about the effects of mass media are similar: mass media depictions can affect the attitudes, perspectives and behavior of its audience. The effect of mass media is dependent upon: a) the content of the media; and b) the extent of exposure to the media. If the media messages are consistent and similar, they have a greater effect—the greater the exposure to mass media (given consistency), the greater the effects upon the viewer.

As indicated then, it is important to understand the content of the messages. If the messages are consistent and emphasize the importance of diversity and tolerance, we would expect more tolerance on the part of viewers; if the message is consistent and

emphasizes the use of violence, we would expect a higher likelihood of viewers resorting to violence. This research will examine both of these issues: how diverse are the messages, and what the content of the messages is.

### **Recent Literature about Themes in Media**

In this section, I examine research that addresses the content of media messages.

#### ***Violence***

There have been two major views about violence: the catharsis idea and the acceptance idea. The catharsis notion was that viewing violence or participating in some types of violence would relieve feelings of violence and actually lessen the likelihood of an individual becoming violent. Berkowitz and Rawlings (1963) studied the effects of violence and mass media in relation to feelings of catharsis or purging emotions that would allow one to have sympathy or empathy towards those who were the victims of violence or aggression. Very little evidence suggests support for the “catharsis” notion. Rich et al. (1998) state an idea shared by many researchers who “propose that the most insidious and potent effect of media violence is to desensitize all of us to real life violence and to the harm caused its victims” (672). Drabman and Thomas (1974), Thomas and Drabman (1975), Thomas et al. (1977), Geen (1981), Griffiths and Shuckford (1989), and Molitor and Hirsch (1994) are supporters of the desensitization hypothesis. In specific reference to music videos, Smith and Boyson (2002) took their research further in by saying that “the way music videos present violence increases the risk of psychological harm” (80). So not only can people become desensitized or experience catharsis from being overexposed to media violence, but people can cause psychological harm to themselves, and their children, from this exposure.

Violence has been a major theme in mass media that concerns parents, politicians, and researchers alike. Heavy viewing of violence may be associated with favorable attitudes toward violence where “American television is the most violent in the world” (Orange and George 2000, 308). Because of the increasing amount and brutality of violence that people are exposed to on a daily basis, moreover Rich et al. (1998) specifically address music video and maintain that “music videos are short, nonlinear, impressionistic, and even more likely than narrative television or film to use violence for its arousal effect, rather than revealing its realistic consequences” (672) and have found among more than 3000 studies that there is a consistent association between viewing televised violence and subsequent aggressive behavior (670). Even though both music and television capture young people’s attention, music has the most influence on their emotions, Rich et al. (1998) argue, and is a powerful force for creating and stirring feelings and attitudes. Rich et al. (1998) conducted a content analysis of music videos examining the effects of gender and race on violence by network and found that violent portrayals in music videos varied between 11.5% and 22.4% by network (BET, CMT, MTV, and VH-1). MTV, whose target audience is adolescents aged 12 to 19, is the largest music television network and as much as 57% of MTV music videos portrayed violence, as reported by early content analyses (670).

In a content analysis by Smith and Boyson (2002) 15% of the music videos of the 2000 music videos included in their research contained violence, and that across BET, MTV, and VH-1, most of the violent acts were not chastised and were often presented in realistic situations. Funk et al. (2004) say that “violence in entertainment media is also considered by many to be a major contributor to aggressive and violent behavior in real



life” and is “the most prevalent and most thoroughly studies-source for children and adolescents” because of easy-access to screen-based media entertainment (25). As with Rich et al. (1998), Drabman and Thomas (1974), Thomas and Drabman (1975), Thomas et al. (1977), Geen (1981), Griffiths and Shuckford (1989), and Molitor and Hirsch (1994), Funk et al. (2004) say that people can become desensitized to repeated exposure to media and real-life violence, believing that “desensitization, the attenuation or elimination of cognitive, emotional, and, ultimately, behavioral responses to a stimulus, is one of the key mechanisms proposed for the effects of exposure to violence (25). Rich et al. (1998) say that “exposure to sexual violence in music video and other media desensitizes male viewers to violence against women and heightens a sense of disempowerment among female viewers” (673).

Smith and Boyson (2002) summarized their findings by making a comparison between the two major music video networks, MTV and BET. “The violence in music videos on BET can be characterized as involving African American characters [usually male] engaging in repeated justified violence that is neither rewarded or punished and involves little gun play and minimal amounts of blood and gore” and in contrast “the template for violence on MTV is attractive characters [usually male] engaging in extensive aggression that is graphic, involves the use of a gun, and is neither rewarded nor punished” (Smith and Boyson 2002, 78). Media images become the perpetrators of “justified violence” indirectly by allowing the consequences of violence to be separated from the acts of violence (Funk et al. 2004, 26). Linz et al. (1992) say that “many people blame the escalating violence and sexual violence in the mass media for fueling the growth in sexual violence” and that “one of the primary causes of teen violence is

exposure to certain depictions in the mass media” (146). The authors found that a significant amount of research has shown that sex and violence are common themes in mass media presentations (Linz et al. 1992).

Other studies have found that television is regarded by teens as at least second in importance to parents as a source of sexual influence (Roberts et al. 1978). If teenagers view television as an important source in which to get information and advice on life, and television produces images and ideas that can relay the message that promiscuity and violence are normal parts of life, then the opinions of their parents and community leaders, even if they send other messages, decrease in value. This idea continues to gain support with the recent changes in media technology which “suggest that mass media may play an increasingly important role in adolescent sexual development” especially with “the expansion of cable television [which] has increased the diversity of the home media environment for most families” (Linz et al. 1992, 147). Most people have unlimited access to music video programs with over 70% of American homes subscribing to cable network television including BET, MTV, VH1, and CMT (Smith and Boyson, 2002; 62). Linz et al. (1992) suggest in conclusion that “exposure to sexual violence in mass media may result in harmful societal effects” and found research demonstrating that “exposure to violent materials that are either sexually explicit or sexually nonexplicit results in less sensitivity toward victims of sexual violence and a heightened tendency to endorse rape myths” (167).

Smith and Boyson’s 2002 study, one of the few to use a representative sample of video music, examined the effects of race, age, gender, and attractiveness on music video violence by network. They assessed whether or not the amount of content of physical

aggression varied across different channels and genres of a composite week of music video programming, randomly sampling programs from MTV, BET, and VH1 between 6am and 11pm. The authors make reference to a statement made by Frank Palumbo of the American Academy of Pediatrics who said that “with the advent of MTV and VH-1, not only do we have to listen to violent lyrics that for example degrade women, but we also get to see it acted out in full color” (61).

Related to the desensitization argument, Bandura argues that media can “legitimize, glamorize and trivialize human violence” (Bandura 2001, 9). Bandura discusses a set of disengagement practices that people use in reference to what they see in media and how they deal with what is learned observationally. Through his analysis, he was able to find other research that showed how these disengagement factors are varied throughout media portrayals of violence and aggression, thus demonstrating the uninhibited power of media influences (Bandura 2001, 11). His final set of disengagement practices operates under the concept of dehumanization. The way in which viewers’ perceive, place value on, correct, or reward their actions is enhanced by their exposure to this same media that morally justifies violent and aggressive conduct, blames and dehumanizes victims, displaces and diffuses personal responsibility, and filters destructive consequences, ultimately desensitizing viewers’ (Bandura 2001, 11). Consistent with Bandura’s argument Rich et al. (1998) emphasize the role of well-known actors or stars saying that their portrayed aggression may “serve to normalize, make acceptable, and romanticize the use of interpersonal violence to resolve conflicts, to release anger, and to prevail in the pursuit of personal goals” (673).

Bandura (2001) says that models, such as entertainers, “not only exemplify and legitimate new practices, they also serve as advocates for them by directly encouraging others to adopt them” just by their participation (15). Sometimes those who hold the most power in a community or even in society as a whole, often acquire innovation from the media and pass them on to their followers, whether it is teens to their peers, parent to child, or entertainer to her audience. People’s perspectives and ways of life can be indirectly altered by televised modeling. However, sometimes judgments, values, and conduct can be altered directly by televised modeling without having to wait for an influential intermediary to adopt what has been shown and then to serve as the diffuser to others—in this way, media can create personal attributes as well as alter preexisting ones (Bandura 2001, 14).

### ***Media and Sexuality***

Brown (2002) says that with the increasing accessibility of mass media, and if parents and schools do not discuss sexual topics, the media can become the most important resource for learning about sex for Dukes et al. (2003) report L. Kalof as saying “sexual imagery of many songs is so powerful that it ultimately defines what is masculine and what is feminine,” in a 1993 article “Dilemmas of Femininity” (643). “Sexual talk and displays are increasingly frequent and explicit in this mediated world” where “one fifth to one half of music videos, depending on the music genre (e.g., country, rock, rap) portray sexuality or eroticism” (42). Sexual content has been on the rise in television programs over the last eight years, ranging from flirting to sexual intercourse; the amount of contexts in which sexual intercourse is central is more frequent than what researchers have expected. DuRant et al. (1997) examined how the level of sexuality or

eroticism was portrayed in conjunction with tobacco and/or alcohol use in music videos. They found that “videos with measurable levels of sexuality or eroticism were significantly more likely to contain alcohol use than videos with no referral to sexuality” (1134). In her review of mass media literature, Brown (2002) talks about the three C’s of responsible sexual behavior: commitment, contraceptives, and consequences; and says that among television programs that have sexual content, roughly 10% of them make any mention of the “three C’s.”

Dukes et al. (2003) conducted a content analysis of popular songs examining the effects of gender, race, and time on the expressions of love, sex, and hurt. Dukes et al. (2003) report that there are fewer appeals to sex now than there were two to three decades ago. Brown (2002) would agree with Dukes et al. as well and she would say that mainstream mass media, including television, magazines, movies, music, and the Internet, has an impact on sexual beliefs and behaviors because “media portrayals reinforce a relatively consistent set of sexual and relationship norms” rarely depicting sexually responsible models (42). Dukes et al. (2003) research supports the claim that love has become less frequent of a topic in music. They hypothesized that lyrics of the top 100 songs from 1958 through 1998 contained fewer references to love. Even though 81 songs from their research had lyrics about love and majority had romantic love as their main theme (644), they report that younger more contemporary male and female artists make fewer references to love than their older counterparts (647).

### ***Status & Agent of Socialization***

Watkins (2000 ) discuss how the mass media plays a significant role in socializing youth and inaccurately portraying “real life” scenarios of which status attenuation and

materialism are shown as the main values in American society. Watkins (2000) argues that the conspicuous consumption and media advertising may cause frustration and stigma for those who cannot afford luxuries. As a result, poor youth may seek out “compensatory status symbols” such as expensive sneakers and jewelry. Watkins (2000) goes on to say that “high levels of television viewership tend to correspond with low economic status” and because “poor and working class children are less likely to have access to non-school related extra-curricular activities, they may spend more time at home, thus increasing their viewership of television” and increasing the likelihood they will have social and psychological problems (3).

### ***Gender in Media***

Nathanson et al. (2002) agree that television can perpetuate gender stereotypes (922). Their experimental analysis research reveals that people can be affected by gender-stereotyped television—this idea became the guide in their experimental research on how mediation can counteract the effects of female stereotypes on television. This study consisted of showing children clips of a popular children’s television program in which the actors were involved in stereotypical activities (Nathanson et al. 2002). They found an interaction between the effect of mediation condition on grade-level: younger children, children in kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, with mediation (a message that contradicted a stereotypical behavior) were more accepting of nontraditional gender roles than younger children with no mediation; there was nothing significant reported about the older children, 4<sup>th</sup> grade through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. A large body of research suggests that television can be a powerful influence on how gender roles are perceived. Nathanson et al. (2002) report that since “television repeatedly portrays gender stereotypes” and

“uniformly and consistently depicts males and females” in certain perspective, people who spend a great deal watching television are more likely to become more stereotyped (924).

Orange and George (2000) maintain that rap, in particular, relates to gender roles that emphasize domination of women. They feel that rap music videos are perfect models for how to learn to sexually abuse, exploit, and disrespect women, self, and the community (308). Hall (1998) further states that “heavy metal music, which features the thundering rhythm of the electric bass guitar and drums, is often characterized by songs that glorify violence, abuse against women, hate, deviant sexual activity, and the occult, notable satanic worship” (802). She further states that “rap music also often advocates violent activities, substance abuse, and sex, but heavy metal music generally advocates rebellion and Satanism as well” (Hall 1998, 802).

### ***Alcohol & Smoking in Media***

Some researchers feel that the entertainment industry is partially to blame for promoting adolescent health risk and problem behaviors by portraying so-called role models in scenarios that show them engaging in sex-, alcohol-, and drug-related activities (DuRant et al. 1997, 1131). Andsager et al. (2002) maintain that even though alcohol consumption is illegal, television viewers are exposed to alcohol messages by logos, and advertising that suggests that consumption of alcohol leads to positive experiences. DuRant et al. (1997) say that television is “a leading source of information about alcohol and other drugs for adolescents” (1134). Through their content analysis of the relationship between alcohol and tobacco use and television network (MTV, BET, VH-1, and CMT), DuRant et al. (1997) believed that MTV and BET would contain more

tobacco and alcohol use and found that MTV had the most. They found that the lead performer was usually the only actor in the music videos who engaged in the use of tobacco and/or alcohol, through their content analysis of music videos and the portrayal of tobacco and alcohol use. This supports their belief that “role models such as musicians, actors, and athletes have a substantial influence on adolescents’ normative expectations about health risk and problem behaviors when they are observed engaging in these behaviors in the media, such as music videos” (DuRant et al. 1997, 1131).

### ***Individualism***

Finally, Dukes et al. (2003) feel that American music culture has become characterized by a greater emphasis on individuality with their data suggesting that “greater selfishness could have been triggered by differential power” (649). They gathered songs from three time-clusters: cluster one was between 1958 and 1972; cluster two was between 1976 and 1984; and cluster three was between 1991 and 1998. They found that “lyrics performed by white artists expressed a greater percentage of appeals to selfishness than lyrics performed by African American artists” (649). Dukes et al. (2003) support this idea and says that a “master theme in culture is individualism” (643). They found that 33% of the songs performed by men and 33% of the songs performed by women showed selfishness, but these findings were not statistically significant; however, the range for selfishness as a theme was between 19% for Black women and 48% for white women, a significant interaction between gender and race (Dukes et al. 2003).

### **Types of Media Programming**

In this next section, I examine research specific to the stations of MTV, BET, and GAC.



### ***Station Information***

In an empirical study, Rich et al. (1998) find that MTV, whose target audience is adolescents aged 12 to 19, is the largest music television network and is watched by 73% of boys on an average of 6.6 hours a week, and 78% of girls on an average of 6.2 hours a week (670). “The media institution of MTV could then function as an example of postmodern corporate global media culture, for the channel is available across diverse cultures and markets” (Bignell 2000, 174). Bignell (2000) feels that MTV’s self-promoting advertising is the epitome of what it says it is but what it is definitely not. One slogan being ‘One world, one image, one channel: MTV’ seems to support this idea of being inclusively exclusive by basically celebrating “the effacement of difference by global consumerism” (174). “Part of MTV’s efforts at homogenization is precisely to incorporate the ‘traditional’ and the ethnically specific” (Bignell 2000, 175).

BET (Black Entertainment Television), launched in 1980, is the first and only cable television network in the United States that is the main cultural center and information source for African Americans. It has reached more than 40 million cable households in 2500 markets and offers as much as 18 hours of music videos a day. Because of the high amount of music video programs it airs, BET is usually recognized as the only black-oriented music video service, even though it owns and operates other Black-oriented media products and programs such as *Emerge* (magazine), BET Radio Network, and a host of television programs (Hunt 1997).

GAC\* (Great American Country) has a target audience between the ages of 25 and 54. It is a 24-hour country music video network that can be accessed through basic

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\*GAC information was found on company FAQ web pages.

cable throughout the United States, reaching over 27 million viewers. Compared to BET, GAC has as much as 600 hours of music videos a day.

### **Summary**

There is a large literature on mass media and the importance of mass media. While there is disagreement about the exact mechanisms involved, there is agreement that media can greatly affect behavior by influencing what is taken for granted. In general, if events are presented and not challenged by other mass media sources, they are likely to shape viewers attitudes and behaviors. This can occur through the process of desensitization to the stimulus (most often discussed with reference to violence) or through implied acceptance of inequality (most often discussed with reference to gender and ethnicity). None of the mass media assume that the viewer is completely passive, however. Interpretation of the viewer is important and must be considered in the context of other forms of available mass media.

Because the consistency and extent of media messages is critical for making the argument that these messages shape behavior, I find it important to make this claim the central issue of this paper. Two important questions arise: who appears in these music videos and what are the most common themes shown?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

To investigate the type of actors or models and the general themes most commonly presented in music videos, we developed a research design that would examine exposure to an audience.

### **Development and Pre-Testing**

A research group composed of five researchers watched a series of music videos and discussed different potential coding conventions. We met for approximately 5 hours as a group while revising different kinds classification and coding sheets. We then independently coded both the lyrics and video until we had high reliability among all group members. Because some of the important themes we wish to investigate concern race/ethnicity and gender, it was important to have a group that was diverse involved in the coding. (See Appendices for codebooks and coding sheets.)

### **Selecting the Sample**

We randomly collected data from a sample of three television networks, Black Entertainment Television (BET), Great American Country (GAC), and Music Television Video (MTV). These television networks were pre-selected based on the amount of music videos they air during a 24-hour period, since each of these stations primarily air music videos. BET, GAC, and MTV were also selected because they are easily accessible and are highly recognizable as music video networks by a majority of the public. Smith and Boyson (2002) say that most people have unlimited access to music video programs with over 70% of American homes subscribing to cable network television including BET, MTV, VH1, and CMT (62). These networks are part of basic cable television packages and no satellite or cable accessories are needed to gain access

to the networks. The other networks in consideration were VH1 and MTV<sub>2</sub>, the sister-station of MTV. VH1 was not part of the final selection because this network primarily airs television programs. MTV<sub>2</sub> was not part of the final selection because it was not part of a regular television or basic cable television package. Data from each station was recorded on to a VHS tape for further analysis. One student assistant was assigned to collect videos from each music network to avoid error in recording and to assure maximum randomization of data.

### **Data Collection & Sampling Stages**

Music videos were grouped into 5-30 minute time slots for each day, during a 7-day period, including workdays and weekends, from each of the three music networks. Data collection for each of the 3 stations occurred on the same days during the same 7-day period to minimize error. Every music program from each network was set in 30-minute blocks. Each 30-minute block was numbered and then tallied for each day of the 7-day recording period. The sum plus 1 was entered into a computerized randomizer at [www.random.org](http://www.random.org) to randomly assign the 5 time slots for recording for each day. The first five numbers were taken and represented the 5, 30-minute time slots that were to be recorded for each network for that day. My assistants and I pre-set the VCRs to record the 5-30 minute time slots for each day for each network. All information including advertisements, news updates, and anything other than music videos were recorded if they were part of the randomly selected 30-minute time slot. The entire music video that appeared at the exact minute that was randomly selected, including the music video lyrics, constituted the data collected for analysis. If something other than a music video, such as a commercial or a news update was part of that minute, the video directly

preceding the non-music video segment was coded in its entirety. The above procedure resulted in 99 videos (rather than 105) because MTV did not show videos on Sunday

### **Coding**

Two researchers independently coded the videotapes and two researchers independently coded the lyrics of the video. The researchers were grouped together to maximize ethnic and gender diversity within the team. Videos were coded by a White, male and a Black female; lyrics were coded by a White female and a Vietnamese Male. For this analysis, I will emphasize the videos themselves but will make reference to the lyrics. Because the video codes were almost all categorical, the head researcher's codes for the videos were used for final analysis. Other researchers' codes were mainly used for reliability testing and for creating and revising categories, codes, and explanations of why they were used.

The code sheet developed for the videos was used by both coders to record the data (see Appendix B). Once the data was coded directly from the video onto the sheet, the researchers entered the data into a spreadsheet. The two coders met to compare their coding. Because almost all coding was categorical, the reliability estimates were based upon the number of agreements between the coders. So, for example, for the code "ethnicity of focal actor", the coders agreed on 98 of the 99 codes. The reliability estimate simply takes the number of agreements over the total number of events. This yields a reliability estimate of .99. When reliability fell below .80, the coders sometimes collapsed categories to determine if the reliability of the collapsed categories was

acceptable. The data reported only has reliabilities at .80 or above.\* We tested for reliability only on non-repeated videos; 17 of the 29 MTV videos, 19 of the 35 BET videos, and 33 of the 35 GAC videos, for a total of 69 unrepeated videos.

For lyrics, a code sheet was also created and went through some modifications through the pre-tests (see Appendix D). Coders independently coded the number of different types of words and/or themes based upon the printed lyrics available. All codes were frequency of occurrence. Reliability for these was calculated by simple correlation. For the analysis, only the data with .80 correlations or higher is used. To develop the analysis data, a mean is created simply by summing the frequencies coded by the researchers and dividing by two (see Appendix A for video codebook and Appendix C for lyric codebook).

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\*A large part of this research was reserved for the analysis of other actors besides the focal actors. But due to low reliability in reference to the actual number of other actors for each video on each network (less than .80) and its affect on the other categories regarding "other actors," the entire section discussing "other actors" has been excluded from further analysis.

## RESULTS

It is probably not surprising that race is highly related to the networks. But it is somewhat surprising that the differences between networks are so extreme. Table 1 indicates the race of the focal actors (those primarily featured in the video) and the station on which they appeared. Race categories include Black, White, and neither Black nor

<b>Table 1. Race of Focal Actors*</b>			
	Black (%)	White (%)	Neither† (%)
MTV	26 (36)	37 (51)	9 (13)
BET	87 (89)	4 (4)	7 (7)
GAC	1 (1)	73 (94)	4 (5)
Total	114 (46)	114 (46)	20 (8)
<i>Note:</i> Chi-Square is 153.512 <span style="float: right;">p &lt; .05 has a critical value of 9.488</span> * Percentages tally across race by network. † Includes Hispanic, Asian, Mixed, and other race focal actors.			

White, which incorporates Asian, Hispanic, Mixed-race, and other races and/or ethnicities. Only 8% of the focal actors are neither Black nor White. Very few Asians, Hispanics, or Mixed-race focal actors are represented in any of the videos on these three networks. BET is almost exclusively Black (89%) while GAC is almost exclusively White (94%), even less diverse than BET. As can be seen from the table, the  $X^2$  of 153.512 clearly indicates a statistically significant relationship between the networks and the race of focal actors. I can reject the null hypothesis and affirm the claim that there is a difference between the networks in their racial representation.

Are men and women equally distributed as the focal actors of music videos within these three networks and in general? Yes, as Table 2 demonstrates, male and female

focal actors are equally distributed within networks or between networks. As can be seen from the above table, of all the 99 randomly chosen videos, there were 247 focal actors, 165 (67%) males and 82 (33%) females. BET has the most male focal actors (70%) and

**Table 2. Gender of Focal Actors**

	Females (%)	Males (%)
MTV	24 (33)	48 (67)
BET	29 (30)	69 (70)
GAC	29 (38)	48 (62)
Total*	82 (33)	165 (67)

*Note:* Chi-Square is 1.267

$p < .05$  has a critical value of 5.990

\*GAC is missing one data entry.

GAC has the most female focal actors (38%). These overall percentages do not differ much by network, ultimately showing that female focal actors are underrepresented and male focal actors are overrepresented on these three networks. The  $X^2$  of 1.267 is not statistically significant relationship between the networks and the gender of focal actors.

For the amount of skin exposed, we can see from tables 3 and 4 that there is remarkable similarity across networks. For males, skin exposed basically includes only bare chest and/or back. For females, fully clothed means modestly dressed—can include shorts and tee shirts, suit coat and skirt, pants, long sleeved shirts, tank tops; but does not include any type of midriff-shirt, any type of skirt or shorts that expose the buttocks, tops with deep v-necks or backs, or long skirts with very high splits. Two important findings have surfaced out of this analysis: while female focal actors are frequently shown with their skin exposed, men focal actors are infrequently shown with skin exposed. 22% of the total videos portrayed male focal actors with their skin exposed (shirtless) and 65% of



the total videos portrayed female focal actors with their skin exposed. As can be seen from the male focal actor table, the chi-square of 6.046 for male focal actor characteristics indicates a statistically significant relationship between the networks and male focal actor—skin exposure. So I can again reject the null hypothesis and affirm the

**Table 3. Male Focal Actor Skin Exposure**

	Skin Exposed (%)	No Skin Exposed (%)
MTV	9 (37.5)	15 (62.5)
BET	8 (24)	26 (76)
GAC	3 (10)	28 (90)
Total	20 (22)	69 (78)
<i>Note:</i> Chi-Square is 6.046		$p < .05$ has a critical value of 5.990

claim that there is a difference between networks in their representation of male focal actors with skin exposed. In particular, the males on GAC are less likely to have their shirts off than MTV in particular. However, the chi-square of 3.517 for female focal actor characteristics indicates a statistically insignificant relationship between the networks and female focal actor—fully clothed. So I cannot reject the null hypothesis. The most important consistency here is that for all stations, female focal actors are fewer than males AND at least half of those that do appear are not fully clothed. More than half of the female focal actors were not fully clothed. This could be due to the double-standard placed on women in the music industry to have to show skin in order to be taken seriously or have a prominent role in the music videos. These percentages also show that women are still seen as sex objects, seemingly only in videos for decoration and sex appeal.

**Table 4. Female Focal Actor Fully Clothed**

	Fully Clothed (%)	Not Fully Clothed (%)
MTV	10 (42)	14 (58)
BET	4 (19)	17 (81)
GAC	8 (44)	10 (56)
Total	22 (35)	41 (65)

Note: Chi-Square is 3.517

p < .05 has a critical value of 5.990

Related to issues of sexuality are body modifications involving piercing and tattoos. An interesting finding amongst my data is that overall, across all three networks, male focal actors had more tattoos than did females. Looking at Tables 5 and 6, the percentage of tattoos among female focal actors is only half of the percentage of tattoos of male focal actors.

**Table 5. Female Focal Actor Characteristics**

	Piercing (%)	Tattoos (%)
MTV	3 (13)	5 (21)
BET	7 (33)	7 (33)
GAC	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	10 (16)	12 (19)

**Table 6. Male Focal Actor Characteristics**

	Piercing (%)	Tattoos (%)
MTV	0 (0)	10 (42)
BET	0 (0)	12 (35)
GAC	0 (0)	3 (10)
Total	0 (0)	25 (28)

Only tattoos that were seen were counted in this analysis; previous knowledge of a focal actor's tattoos had no bearing on these findings. In reference to body piercing, not including the traditional ear-lobe piercing, female focal actors are the only actors with piercing, all of which were in the navel. GAC had the least focal actors with piercing and/or tattoos, for both males and females. BET had the most focal actors with piercing and/or tattoos, for both males and females. The low count in these two categories for GAC can be expected considering its regard for traditional values.

Some of the research indicated that status items, objects, goods and services were important messages displayed through television media. As Table 7 shows, 51% of the videos did, indeed depict some form of status objects. The cars and transportation category included any type of high-priced vehicle, such as luxury cars, jets, yachts, motorcycles, and four-wheelers. The jewelry category included jewelry that was flashed

**Table 7. Status Objects of Focal Actors \***

	Cars/Trans (%)	Jewelry (%)	Clothes (%)	Other Objects† (%)	None (%)
MTV	11 (38)	11 (38)	9 (31)	11 (38)	9 (31)
BET	17 (49)	19 (54)	9 (26)	19 (54)	8 (23)
GAC	3 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	32 (91)
Total	31 (31)	30 (30)	18 (18)	30 (30)	49 (49)

Note: Chi-square is 79.810

p < .05 has a critical value of 15.51

\*Status Objects' percentages do not add to 100% because each video can have more than one type of status object portrayed in each video. For example, 38% of MTV videos had focal actors who portrayed cars in their videos; 38% of MTV videos also had focal actors who portrayed jewelry in their videos. The same videos were not represented in each category, although some videos are represented in each category.

†Other Objects includes objects such as rims, gold or platinum teeth, cash money, fan adoration, and shopping sprees

or emphasized, such as large chains, emblems, rings, and earrings. Clothes that were seen as status objects included name brand labels mentioned or shown in the video, furs,

exotic leathers, and artists wearing their own clothing line labels. GAC has the most videos with focal actors who did not have status objects (91%) and BET had the most videos with focal actors who did have status objects with jewelry (54%) being the most prevalent type of status object that was flaunted. So there is not an exact equal distribution of status object use within or across networks. But each network comes close to having an equal distribution of status objects by category. Jewelry, cars/transportation, and other objects each make up 38% of the status objects on MTV, with clothes close behind at 31%. Jewelry and other objects each make up 54% of the status objects on BET, with cars/transportation close at 49%. Clothes (26%) and no status objects (23%) were relatively close on BET as well. Jewelry, clothes, and other objects each make up 0% of the status objects on GAC. There is a significant chi-square of 79.810 with a critical value of 15.51 where  $p < .05$  indicating that GAC showed less status objects than MTV and BET.

The lack of diversity by race and gender has been shown within these networks. There is also a lack of diversity by age and the following table (Table 8) shows how the older-aged and child-aged focal actors were the two collective-age groups that were rarely, if at all, represented on MTV, BET, and GAC. The categories were as follows: children—birth to preteen; middle—teenaged to about 50; older—aged 50 and over; and mixed—included actors from all age groups. 95% of all the 99 videos had focal actors whose collective age was in the middle-aged category and only 4% had focal actor whose collective age was that of a mixed-age group, with ages ranging from the very young to the very old (roughly newborn to past the age of life expectancy).

**Table 8. Age of Focal Actors**

	Child (%)	Middle (%)	Older (%)	Mixed (%)
MTV	0 (0)	29 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
BET	0 (0)	34 (97)	0 (0)	1 (3)
GAC	1 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (9)
Total	1 (1)	94 (95)	0 (0)	4 (4)

A few videos had 1 to 2 older individuals as other actors but the collective, or average, age of all the focal actors fell in the middle-aged category (roughly the ages between 18 and 50).

The next issue I will address regards the attire of the focal actors and location of the videos. What types of backgrounds were used in the videos and what were the focal actors wearing? Was there a wide variety of dress styles and video locations across networks? About 93% of all the videos shot scenes inside and/or outside real places, such as houses, night clubs, and neighborhoods. Roughly 7% of all the videos were set inside and/or outside fantasy places, such as animated houses and neighborhoods, and paper cutouts of houses or parks. There is hardly any difference between networks on video location, background, or setting; each network had similar representation under each location category. The most common dress style across networks at 52% was casual, which does not include tee shirt/jeans combination. It is probably not surprising that GAC was the only network that had focal actors in cowboy-style dress, which was the second highest dress category for GAC—57% was casual attire and 51% was cowboy-style attire. A popular trend among male hip hop, rap, and R&B artists is to not dress up or wear costumes but to dress down, wearing only a tee shirt (usually white) and jeans. That trend is apparent in the data from BET where 49% of the focal actors were in

tee shirts and jeans. The focal actors on MTV were predominantly causal (62%) with the tee shirt and jean combination the second most popular at 31%. (See Appendix A for further explanation of location and dress categories and codes.)

As discovered in my research, there have been many studies focusing on the themes shown in television programs and music videos, with the most popular being love. However, to my surprise, 46% of the music videos I analyzed, almost half, did not have love as the overall theme or even as part of the collection of themes represented in

	Found or In Love (%)	Love Lost or Lost & Found (%)	No Love (%)
MTV	5 (17)	14 (48)	10 (34)
BET	5 (14)	6 (17)	24 (69)
GAC	15 (43)	8 (23)	12 (34)
Total	25 (25)	28 (28)	46 (46)

the music videos. Table 9 shows that BET had the most videos that displayed no love as the only theme or one of the many themes (69%). This could be due to the heightened portrayal of sexuality in rap and hip hop music. Unsurprisingly, GAC has the highest percentages of videos with actors who found love or are in love (43%). MTV and BET are fairly close in the r percentages of music videos with actors who found love or are in love—17% for MTV and 14% for BET.

With regards to other themes prevalent in music videos, the two most popular themes were having the focus of the videos on self (the artist) and having the focus of the videos on others, at 58% and 45%, respectively, shown in Table 10b. MTV, BET, and GAC have these two themes as the most and second most prevalent theme of their music

**Table 10a. Themes\* Other Than Love (Self to Freedom)**

	Self (%)	Other (%)	Other Themes (%)	Rebellion/Freedom (%)
MTV	20 (69)	10 (34)	8 (28)	2 (7)
BET	18 (51)	18 (51)	6 (17)	8 (23)
GAC	19 (54)	17 (49)	9 (26)	3 (9)
Total	57 (58)	45 (45)	23 (23)	13 (13)

**Table 10b. Themes\* Other Than Love (Partying to Religion)**

	Party/Dance (%)	Sex (%)	Violence (%)	Religion (%)
MTV	3 (10)	3 (10)	1 (3)	0 (0)
BET	6 (17)	6 (17)	4 (11)	4 (11)
GAC	4 (11)	2 (6)	2 (6)	1 (3)
Total	13 (13)	11 (11)	7 (7)	5 (5)

\*Theme percentages do not add to 100% because each video can have more than one prevalent theme. For example, 69% of the videos on MTV focus on self but that video could portray actors who are participating in violent activities.

videos. As can be seen in Table 10b, and somewhat expected, religion was the least common theme between networks and within networks. MTV had no videos with a religious or supernatural theme; BET had 11% of its videos with a religious or supernatural theme, even though this category tied with the violent theme; and GAC had only 1 video with a religious or supernatural theme—the video depicted the focal actor practicing voodoo.

Further evidence of the focus on self theme can be seen in the lyrics themselves. Table 11 gives the average number of times each term appears in the lyrics. The numbers

indicate that there is a large concern with individualism in general. This is most extreme in BET and less extreme in GAC. The sheer numbers give support to the idea that the

**Table 11. Lyrical Terms\***

	I	You	We
MTV	19	18	4
BET	29	23	4
GAC	11	5	1
Total	59	46	9

\*Each number is the average of that term's appearance in the lyrics for every video.

the video's concerns are primarily about primary groups, and in particular the person themselves.

Other themes that were popular on MTV were the practice of materialism and fame, and they represented 28% of the overall percentage of themes. On GAC, 26% of the videos had themes that were not one of the given themes. They fell under the categories of childhood memories, love of America, and celebration of life. Rebellion and Freedom was the theme third-most represented in the BET videos at 23%, in which case rebellion was often shown against mainstream society and the structures that uphold society and the freedom most often represented being free to live life without societal controls.



## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

While there are a large number of different perspectives about exactly why media is important for socialization, all of these point to the importance of media, particularly the idea that the greater the exposure to media, the greater the effect of media. This study examined what kinds of models and messages are available to a video music audience. We randomly sampled times throughout a week that a viewer could have seen music videos. Consequently this study is a study of exposure rather than a study of specific videos themselves.

I investigated issues related to gender and sexuality and found that women are far less represented as focal actors than are men. This was consistent across all stations—women constituted only about a third of the focal actors. Furthermore, when they were represented, about half the time, they were in various states of undress. This demonstrates that viewers see far fewer women as the main artist or protagonist and those that are seen are seen in terms of their sexuality. This seems to support many of the criticisms of media that suggest that women's subordination is reinforced through media representations (see for example Nathanson et al. 2002).

This research did not find the extent of violence sometimes reported by other studies. Rich et al. (1998) found that violence was least frequent on BET (11.5%) as compared to MTV (22.4%) and other major music television networks (672). Smith and Boyson (2002) found that MTV (17%) and BET (17%) are more likely to feature music videos with violence but that a full 80% of music videos featured a single violent interaction (69). I found that violence was least frequent on GAC (3%) and most frequent on BET (11%), and overall, it was the second least prevalent theme. Only 7% of

all the videos had a violent theme. What I considered to be violent acts and themes were destroying valuables and the interior of homes (as in Avril Lavigne and Britney Spears videos), threats to cause harm (as in Master P's videos), fighting (as in Outkast and Beyoncé videos), robbing or stealing (as in Hoobastank's video), and the use or portrayal of guns or other weapons (as in Clay Walker's videos).

From a thorough literature analysis, I have noticed that so much emphasis has been put on violence in the media and how it affects its viewers. But according to my data, the emphasis should be on the themes of rebelling and the quest for freedom, whether it is from society, authority, or from pressures of life itself. Binder (1993) believes that a major theme is heavy metal and rap music is defiance against authority and mainstream society. Rich et al. (1998) also uncovered an interaction effect between race and gender: first, Blacks were portrayed as aggressors at more than twice the frequency of their 12% representation in the U.S. population—a finding that could not be supported by my limited data on violence, race, and the networks in which these factors are represented; second, White females were the single largest race-gender group portrayed as victims; and last, music videos may be perpetuating and reinforcing false stereotypes of aggressive Black males and easily victimized White females—another finding that could not be supported by my data based on the race and gender percentages on BET (Rich et al. 1998, 673). I did not notice any of the violence relationships that Rich et al. found in their analysis. In fact, I found that there was no aggressive or violent behavior systematically directed towards any one person, gender, or race.

My findings regarding individualism support Dukes et al. (2003) conclusion that individualism is a major theme. There was a very large proportion of the videos that

stressed ideas of the “self” and when I examined the lyrics, the number of references to “I” was overwhelming. Dukes et al. (2003) report a statistically significant difference between the lyrics of White and Black artists. Their analysis concluded that selfishness was a major theme in only 28% of Black artists’ lyrics, with Black females at the lowest (19%), while 38% of White artists’ lyrics had content that was considered selfish, with White females at the highest (48%) (648). My findings suggest that MTV had the highest percentage of appeals to self (69%) but this appeal applies to a more racially-diverse group of artists. Looking at the artist population of GAC, 94% of the artists are White. I could say that I would agree with their conclusion. When looking at the videos, examining the imagery, the activities, and the lyrics, I found that GAC had a greater percentage of appeals to selfishness as compared to BET, who has a predominantly Black artist population (89%). But when looking at just the lyrics, terms about self are much more common on BET and MTV than on GAC, as noted in Table 11.

Regarding sexuality, my data supports DuRant et al. (1997) research findings on BET and sexuality. Sex was a major theme in only 11% of all the music videos I analyzed but sex was a major theme of 17% of the music videos on BET, which was the most of all the networks. Dukes et al. (2003) says that “the greatest average number of sex words was used by Black men,” a population that was overrepresented on BET (649). Dukes et al. (2003) hypothesized that “the quality of love expressed in the Top 100 love songs has diminished” and felt that this trend may be due to the fact that “the expressed of love reflected in song lyrics may have changed as the culture has become more individualistic” (644). But they found that there interactions were not statistically significant and the theme of love did not vary by period, gender, or race. I find that 46%

of the music videos had no love, shown in the videos or expressed in the lyrics, where BET had the highest percentage of music videos expressing no love (69%).

There are two observations related to the artists in the videos and what the artists are involved in. First, there was a huge difference between the networks for race/ethnic differences. BET was almost entirely composed of Blacks; GAC was almost entirely composed of Whites. MTV was the most ethnically diverse. This clearly demonstrates that there is segregation within the videos themselves. This segregation not only includes race/ethnicity but it includes age as well. There is a remarkable absence of both the young and the old. Videos are populated by healthy, relatively young people (between the ages of 18 and 30). Women are greatly underrepresented as focal actors and when they are focal actors, they tend to achieve that status by virtue of their bodies. This is not just an emphasis upon sexuality, because the men are not presented in the same sort of way; a much smaller proportion of men had parts of their body exposed. Secondly, the themes of the video varied somewhat. There were few, if any, instances of explicit violence, drugs, or even alcohol. But there was a pervasive emphasis upon individualism and status objects or some type of consumerism, although this was less the case on GAC than on BET or MTV.

Thus, some of the most disturbing themes that others had suggested were common but drug use, sexually irresponsible behavior, and aggression or violence were not common. This suggests a somewhat hopeful message: perhaps videos are becoming more responsible in what they show. On the other hand, it is important not only to examine what the videos do show, but what they do not show. There were very few

themes that could be easily identified, and the most common themes involved being in love or some aspect of love. So the question arises: what themes are absent?

There was little emphasis on family. GAC was the only network that showed videos that emphasized family, for example Alan Jackson and Kenny Chesney's videos were focused on memories and traditions within their own families. Alan Jackson was featured as the main character in his video *Drive*, which paralleled his memories as a child with his father, with his current activities with his daughters. He mainly focused on the importance of passing down family traditions to his children and being as involved with their lives as his parents were in his. *There Goes My Life*, by Kenny Chesney, was the only video that dealt with the realities of teen pregnancy. It focused on a teenaged-couple's decision to have a child and raise it together, to get married, and to make a life for their child that was more informed than their lives.

There were few themes that included abstract notions involving community or religion. One important exception to this is that on Sundays, BET shows about 20 gospel music videos during its religious programs, such as *Lift Every Voice*. Another exception is that BET had a few videos that focused on uplifting artists and different music styles, and embraced the idea that having a sense of community, family, group cohesion, and moral support should take precedence over fame and fortune, at the cost of conforming to the status quo; some examples would be Slum Village and Dilated Peoples.

*Tainted*, a music video by Slum Village, depicted different characters in a make-believe world of fame and fortune—a life “tainted” with vanity and selfishness: one character was in love with money; another had a fixation with succeeding at any cost; a young man was infatuated with the idea of having more than one love interest; and a

young woman used her body and good looks to get ahead in society. The alter-egos of these characters were shown as leading fulfilling lives because they were true to themselves, genuinely unselfish, accepting of others, and willing to compromise without yielding to societal, and often times, peer standards of success.

*This Way* by Dilated Peoples (featuring Kanye West) had a similar outlook on how people view societal standards of success as being focused on materialism and selfishness. The actors played different roles in a neighborhood that was dying from a lack of economic stability, where each actor represented different sectors of society and their lives represented different ways of attaining economic success, each looking for a way out of their desolate environment. The actors learn that they can not live their lives “this way” and free themselves of what was keeping them from living a better life. One young man was “freed” from a huge chain around his neck which allowed him to leave his street hustling life behind. Another man was “freed” from his life of homelessness by throwing away a bottle of alcohol and signing up for aid.

In all, the above videos were exceptions to what is usually depicted in music videos on MTV, BET, and GAC.

I began this manuscript by discussing the importance of media, especially television, in creating “what we take for granted.” My observations raise concern for the effect of music videos on viewer normative expectations about race, gender roles, relationships, sexuality, and individualism. My data indicate that music videos can expose people to glamorized depictions of selfishness, heightened sexuality, female exploitation, and ethnocentrism. There have been many studies that suggest that the mass media can affect awareness of, and beliefs about, society. Based upon this analysis, these

music videos enable a world that is not blatantly violent, but that does not advocate fighting against the status quo. And what is the status quo? A world that is ethnically segregated, dominated by men, focused on intimate, non-romantic relationships, and consumed with materialism and hedonism.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**VIDEO CODEBOOK**

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>COLUMN</b>
<b>Id # (101-335)</b>	1
<b>Network:</b> 1=MTV; 2=BET; 3=GAC MTV will be 101-130 BET will be 201-235 GAC will be 301-335	2-3
<b>Focal actor 1 ethnicity</b> 1=Black; 2=Hispanic; 3=Asian; 4=White; 5=Mixed; 6=Other	4
<b>Focal actor 1 sex:</b> 1=female; 2=male	5
<b>Number of other focal actors:</b> 0-9	6
<b>Focal Actor 2 ethnicity</b> 1=Black; 2=Hispanic; 3=Asian; 4=White; 5=Mixed; 6=Other if none then leave blank.	7
<b>Focal actor 2 sex:</b> 1=female; 2=male; if none then leave blank	8
<b>Focal actor 3 ethnicity</b> 1=Black; 2=Hispanic; 3=Asian; 4=White; 5=Mixed; 6=Other If none, leave blank.	9
<b>Focal actor 3 sex:</b> 1=female; 2=male, if none then leave blank	10
<b>Focal actor 4 ethnicity</b> 1=Black; 2=Hispanic; 3=Asian; 4=White; 5=Mixed; 6=Other if none leave blank.	11
<b>Focal actor 4 sex:</b> 1=female; 2=male, if none then leave blank	12
<b>Focal actor 5 ethnicity</b> 1=Black; 2=Hispanic; 3=Asian; 4=White; 5=Mixed; 6=Other if none leave blank.	13
<b>Focal actor 5 sex:</b> 1=female; 2=male, if none then leave blank	14
<b>Collective age for focal actors</b> 1=children 2=middle age 3=older 4=mixed if none leave blank	15
<b>Characteristics of Male focal actors</b> Piercing: yes=1; no=2; if no men, leave blank Tattoos: yes=1; no=2, if no men, leave blank	16 17

Skin exposed: Yes=1; no=2, if no men, leave blank	18
<b>Characteristics of Women focal actors</b>	
Abdomen: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no if no women, leave blank	19
Cleavage: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no if no women, leave blank	20
Buttocks: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no if no women, leave blank	21
Legs: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no if no women, leave blank	22
Fully clothed: Yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	23
Piercing: yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	24
Tattoos: yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	25
<b>Dress:</b> (one column)	26
t-shirt and jeans=1	
sports=2	
casual (but not jeans)=3	
cowboy=4	
formal=5	
retro-=6	
costume=7	
other=8	
<b>Type of Status objects:</b>	27
1=Cars/Transportation	
2=Jewelry, emphasized	
3=Clothes	
4=Other	
5=None	
<b>Background or location of video:</b>	28
1=Inside real	
2=Inside fantasy	
3=Outside real	
4=Outside fantasy	
5=Inside and Outside real	
6=Inside and Outside fantasy	
(if coded as 1 & 3, code 5; if coded as 2 & 4, code 6; if coded as 1 & 5, code 5)	
<b>Overall Themes:</b>	
Emphasis on Self: 1=yes; 2=no	29
Emphasis on other or others: 1=yes; 2=no	30
Love: Found or in love=1	31
Love lost or love lost & found=2	
No Love=3	
Themes other than love: 1=yes; 2=no	
Sexuality	32
Violence	33
Rebellion/Freedom	34



Religion/Supernatural	35
Partying/dancing	36
Other	37
<b>Other Actors</b>	
0=if none; 1=5 or less; 2= 6-15; 3=more than 15	38
<b>Ethnicity of Other Actors</b>	39
1=all the same	
2=not all the same	
if none, then leave blank	
<b>Sex of Other Actors</b>	40
1=all the same	
2=not all the same	
if none, then leave blank	
<b>Approximate Age of Other Actors</b>	41
Children =1	
Middle=2	
Over 60=3	
Mixed=4	
if none, then leave blank	
<b>Roles of the Others</b>	42
Objects=1	
Subjects=2	
<b>Characteristics of Male other actors</b>	
Piercing: yes=1; no=2; if no men, leave blank	43
Men tattoos: yes=1; no=2, if no men, leave blank	44
Skin exposed: Yes=1; no=2, if no men, leave blank	45
<b>Characteristics of Women other actors</b>	
Abdomen: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no	46
if no women, leave blank	
Cleavage: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no	47
if no women, leave blank	
Buttocks: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no	48
if no women, leave blank	
Legs: Exposed or emphasized: 1=yes; 2=no	49
if no women, leave blank	
Fully clothed: Yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	50
Piercing: yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	51
Tattoos: yes=1; no=2; if no women, leave blank	52
<b>Type of Status objects:</b>	53
1=Cars/Transportation	
2=Jewelry	
3=Clothes	
4=Other	
5=None	
<b>Comments</b> This field is for researcher comments.	54

## APPENDIX B

### VIDEO CODING SHEET

#### Focal Actors

- **Primary focal actor(s)**

#of actors involved in words/singing/instruments:

Ethnicity of the primary focal actors:

Gender of primary focal actors:

Approximate age category of primary focal actors:

- children      -middle range      - over 60

Dress: Basic style?

- **Secondary focal actor(s)**

#of actors:

Ethnicity of the secondary focal actors:

Gender of secondary focal actors:

Approximate age category of secondary focal actors:

- children      - middle range      - over 60

Dress: Basic style?

<b>Men:</b> Piercing:	Exposed	Emphasized
Skin (shirtless, etc.):	Exposed	Emphasized
Tattoos:	Exposed	Emphasized

**Use of status items:**

Specific Name Brand labels:	Yes	No
-----------------------------	-----	----

Specify:

Types of status objects:	- Cars/Transportation	- Clothes
	- Jewelry	- Furnishings
	- Instruments	- Other

<b>Women:</b>	Abdomen:	Exposed	Emphasized
	Cleavage:	Exposed	Emphasized
	Buttocks:	Exposed	Emphasized
	Legs:	Exposed	Emphasized
	Fully Clothed		
	Piercing:	Exposed	Emphasized

Tattoos:            Exposed            Emphasized

### Use of status items:

Specific Name Brand labels:                      Yes      No

Specify:

Types of status objects:

- Cars/Transportation
- Clothes
- Jewelry
- Furnishings
- Instruments
- Other

## Other actors

Approximate # of others:    -    5 or less  
   -    6-15  
   -    More than 15

- all the same
- a little variability
- lots of variability

Gender Composition:

- all same
- a little variability
- lots of variability

Approximate age of others:    - children    - middle range    - over 60

Roles of the others:

Objects – no emphasis upon the others as people with different identities

Subjects – emphasis upon others as people with different identities

**Men:**            Piercing:    Yes        No

Skin exposed (shirtless, etc.): Yes      No

Tattoos:      Yes      No

**Women:** Abdomen: Exposed Emphasized

Cleavage:      Exposed      Emphasized

Buttocks:      Exposed      Emphasized

Legs:                      Exposed                      Emphasized

### Fully Clothed

Piercing:            Yes            No

Tattoos:            Yes            No

**Use of status items:**

Specific Name Brand labels:                      Yes                      No

Specify:

Types of status objects:

- |                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| - Cars/Transportation | - Clothes     |
| - Jewelry             | - Furnishings |
| - Instruments         | - Other       |

**Background or location of video**

Inside:

House  
Club  
Fantasy  
Other

Outside:

Actual Setting  
Fantasy

**Overall topic/themes of video**

- |                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| - Emphasis on self | - Emphasis on other/others |
|--------------------|----------------------------|

Love:    - Lost    - Found

Drugs	Sexuality
Control (over others)	Freedom
Violence	Rebellion
Homoerotica	Other:

**Other comments**

## APPENDIX C

### LYRIC CODEBOOK

NAME	VARIABLE	CODE
<b>Station</b>	Station video was played on	1= MTV 2= BET 3= GAC
<b>Profanities</b>	# of profanities used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Nigga</b>	# of times Nigga used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Hoe</b>	# of times Hoe used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Alcohol</b>	Is alcohol implied in lyrics?	1=Yes 2= No
<b>Drugs</b>	Are drugs implied in lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>Clothes/Shoes</b>	Are clothes/shoes mentioned as status symbol in lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>PhysPref</b>	Is physical preference mentioned in lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>Jewelry</b>	Is jewelry mentioned as status symbol in lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>Supernatural</b>	# of times reference is made to a supernatural being/entity	Actual #
<b>Country</b>	# of times reference is made to a country	Actual #
<b>Love</b>	# of times "love" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Cars</b>	Are cars mentioned as status symbols in lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>CelebRef</b>	Are there references to celebrities in the lyrics?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>I</b>	# of times "I" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Me</b>	# of times "Me" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>You</b>	# of times "You" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>We</b>	# of times "We" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Us</b>	# of times "Us" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Baby</b>	# of times "Baby" used in lyrics	Actual #
<b>Other</b>	# of other terms of endearment	Actual #
<b>Mom</b>	# of times "Mom" term is used	Actual #

<b>Dad</b>	(non-family reference) # of times "Dad" term is used	Actual #
<b>Symmetry</b>	(non-family reference) Is there video/lyric symmetry?	1=Yes 2=No
<b>Family terms</b>	list family relational terms used in lyrics	Actual word

## APPENDIX D

### LYRIC CODING SHEET

[illegible]









## APPENDIX E

### CHANGES TO CODES

The researchers added seven codes to the original lyrical coding list. They were: “Country” = mention of the United States in any form (U.S., U.S.A., this nation, America, etc...); “Supernatural” = mention of a higher power or religious entities or deities (God, Him, The One, Buddha, Krishna, Satan, etc...); “Love” = the number of times actors mention the word; “Family terms” = mention of family as adjectives or nouns in a non-sexual context (daughter, mother, father, brother, etc...); “Mom” words = mention of its forms in an intimate connotation (mami, ma); “Dad” words = mention of its forms in an intimate connotation (papi); and “Other Terms of Endearment” = Boo, Honey, Sweetheart, etc...

The researchers added numerous codes to the original video coding list. They were: “Casual” = non formal dress (such as slacks, button-down shirts, and dresses but excluding tee shirts, tuxedos, suits, ball gowns, etc...); “Other” = dress styles not expressed in the given categories; “Jewelry” = emphasized jewelry; “Religion” = theme portraying or mentioning of higher power or religious entities or deities (same as lyric coding but includes the practice of any religion); “Partying/Dancing” = theme portraying partying and dancing not matter the background or location; and “Other Themes” = themes not mentioned.

When coding began, many changes had to be made to the video codebook for reliability and efficiency purposes. “Mixed” was added to focal actors’ ethnicity category, expanding it to 6 possible codes. We changed all women characteristic coding options to “Exposed: yes or no” and “Emphasized: yes or no” for “Abdomen,”

“Cleavage,” “Buttocks,” and “Legs,” except for “Fully Clothed.” “Dress” was divided into 8 categories where “yes” and “no” were the only codes. This was strictly for reliability purposes. Once the reliability was calculated, this category was recompiled into one category with 8 possible codes. Status object category for focal and other actors was narrowed to 5 codes, deleting “Instruments” and “Furnishings.” The same expansion and recompiling that was applied to “Dress” was applied to this category as well.

“Location” was narrowed to 6 codes because it was more efficient to combine certain codes. The original codes were: “Inside” (house, club, fantasy, and/or other); and “outside” (actual setting, and/or fantasy). As with “Dress,” “Location” was expanded first for reliability purposed then recompiled for analysis (note the special rule for this category). There were 12 original categories for “Themes.” Then this category was increased to 14 categories when “Partying/Dancing” and “Religion” were added.

After this change, there was a final agreement to make 4 coding-categories under “Overall Themes” including “Emphasis on Self” (yes or no), “Emphasis on Others” (yes or no), “Love” (found or in love; love lost or love lost and found; no love), and “Themes Other Than Love” (“yes” or “no” to sexuality, violence, rebellion/freedom, religion/supernatural, partying/dancing, and/or other), leaving a total of 11 codes under 4 broad categories. The themes that were excluded were “Control,” “Drugs,” “Homoerotica,” and themes that were combined were “Rebellion” and “Freedom;” “Partying” and “Dancing;” and “Religion” and “Supernatural.” “Love” was originally a 2-coded category “lost” and “found” then made into 4 to include being in love, losing love, finding and losing love, or experiencing no love, and then finally becoming a 3-coded category as mentioned above. “Ethnicity of Other Actors” and “Sex of Other

Actors” were both reduced from 3 codes (“lots of variability,” “some variability,” and “a little variability”) to 2 codes (“all the same” or “not all the same”) to minimize disagreements. “Mixed” got added to the age of focal actors’ and other actors’ categories. “Name Brand” was removed from the codebook. To get a more accurate and reliable Chi-square for “Focal Actor Race,” it was collapsed. “Neither Black nor White” was added and it included Hispanic, Asian, Mixed, and Other racial categories.

## VITA

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Delta Xi Nu Multicultural Sorority, Inc.  
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Peer and Parent Advisor, 1998-2002

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Registrar for Special Olympics of Texas

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